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SCIENTISTS: U. S. Can't Get Enough

By WILLIAM MCGAFFIN

WASHINGTON — In this push-button military age, it would be a grave threat to this nation's defenses if the Russians should turn out more scientists than we.

That alarm bell was rung on Capitol Hill last week by Rep. Melvin Price, (D-Ill), chairman of the subcommittee on research and development of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy.

"We are scarcely even with the Soviet Union as regards numbers of engineers and have only a slight lead in numbers of scientists," Price declared. "From here on, the Russians show promise of widening the difference — and to our disadvantage.

"In 1954 we graduated only half as many college-trained specialists in engineering and science as we did in 1950. In the same year the Soviets turned out more than twice as many as we."

Price made these remarks, which he later amplified in a speech on the House floor, in the preface to a study prepared by the congressional legislative reference service. Made at his request, the study was printed in pamphlet form by the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy and released last week. It spells out in frightening detail the arithmetic of the situation.

For instance, it shows that:

The United States now has between 500,000 and 535,000 graduate engineers and between 210,000 and 225,000 graduate scientists.

According to latest estimates, this gives us an edge over the Russians at the moment whether you count the Russian total at 700,000 engineers and scientists or add in 190,000 agricultural specialists to give them a grand total of 890,000.

But the future is black if the United States does not take action.

Allen W. Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, has estimated that the Soviets will graduate 1,200,000 in the sciences between 1950 and 1960, compared to only 900,000 in the United States.

Why is the U. S. short of scientists now?

There are four principal reasons, according to Dr. Clifford C. Furnas, assistant secretary of defense in charge of research and development.

He listed them as follows in secret testimony made in February before the House subcommittee on appropriations and just released.

1. "Our difficulties began during World War II when as a matter of national policy the graduate work in the universities was essentially cut off."

2. Students entering college right after World War II were cautioned against going in for science and engineering on the grounds that they wouldn't be able to find jobs when they got out.

The advice was based on various surveys all of which concluded that there would be an excess of scientists and engineers within 10 years.

This thinking was sound from the viewpoint of the 1930s. But it did not anticipate the vastly increased technological aspects of both industry and the military.

3. A cynical postwar generation of students, interested in the 'quick buck and the soft touch,' is avoiding a career in engineering and science, because it calls for hard work.

4. There is a great shortage of teachers, brought on by the low salaries offered teachers compared to the high salaries available in industry.

What can we do about the situation?

Rep. Price is calling for a "crash program" to increase swiftly and steadily the number of adequately trained scientists and engineers.

He wants to appropriate federal funds to expand the science departments and engineering schools of the universities—and to provide scholarships for bright young high school graduates willing to enter these fields.

To those who would criticize this proposal as raising the controversial question of federal aid to schools, Price replies:

"Since it is a constitutional federal function to provide for the common defense, federal spending is proper to provide enough well-trained engineers and scientists to sustain our security in an age of great scientific break-throughs."

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